

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 445 464

EC 308 071

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TITLE Project ACHIEVE and the Need To Create Effective Building-Based Social Skills, Discipline/Behavior Management, and School Safety Systems.
INSTITUTION University of South Florida, Tampa. Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Inst.; University of South Florida, Tampa. Research and Training Center for Children's Mental Health.
SPONS AGENCY Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (DHHS/PHS), Rockville, MD. Center for Mental Health Services.; National Inst. on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (ED/OSERS), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 1999-02-00
NOTE 8p.; In: The Annual Research Conference Proceedings, A System of Care for Children's Mental Health: Expanding the Research Base (12th, Tampa, FL, February 21-24, 1999).
CONTRACT H133B90022
AVAILABLE FROM For full text:
<http://www.fmhi.usf.edu/institute/pubs/bysubject/html>.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative (142) -- Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; *Behavior Disorders; *Conflict Resolution; Educational Environment; Elementary Education; *Emotional Disturbances; *Inservice Teacher Education; Peer Relationship; *Prevention; Professional Development; Program Effectiveness; Program Evaluation; *Underachievement
IDENTIFIERS *Social Skills Training

ABSTRACT

This report describes the activities and outcomes of Project ACHIEVE, an innovative educational reform program targeting academically and socially at-risk and underachieving students. Project ACHIEVE began as a district-wide training program for school psychologists, guidance counselors, social workers, and elementary-level instructional consultants, and is not a school-based/whole-school professional developing program. Specifically, Project ACHIEVE places emphasis on increasing student performance in the areas of social skills and conflict resolution, improving students' achievement and academic progress, facilitating positive school climates, and in increasing parental involvement and support. This is done through an integrated progress of organizational and resource development, comprehensive inservice training and follow-up, and parent and community involvement. Project ACHIEVE's training is facilitated by pupil services personnel and involves regular and special education teachers, paraprofessionals, school staff, substitute teachers, bus drivers, and volunteers. In addition, the training is extended to and utilizes parent involvement and community agencies. Outcomes evaluations of Project ACHIEVE at three school sites in Florida and Texas indicate students increased their scores on reading, math, and language measures after the implementation of Project ACHIEVE. Discipline referrals also declined after program implementation. (CR)

Project ACHIEVE and the Need to Create Effective Building-Based Social Skills, Discipline/Behavior Management, and School Safety Systems

Project Overview

Project ACHIEVE is an innovative educational reform program targeting academically and socially at-risk and underachieving students (Knoff, Batsche, 1995). Project ACHIEVE began as a district-wide training program for school psychologists, guidance counselors, social workers and elementary-level instructional consultants, and is now a school-based/whole-school professional development program. Specifically, Project ACHIEVE places emphasis on increasing student performance in the areas of social skills and conflict resolution, improving student achievement and academic progress, facilitating positive school climates, and in increasing parental involvement and support. This is done through an integrated process of organizational and resource development; comprehensive in-service training and follow-up; and parent and community involvement.

There are seven interdependent components to Project ACHIEVE. These are: (1) Strategic Planning and Organizational Analysis and Development; (2) the Referral Question Consultation Process (RQC), a systematic problem-solving process to address students' academic and behavioral difficulties; (3) Effective Classroom Teaching and Staff Development; (4) Instructional Consultation and Curriculum-Based Assessment; (5) Behavioral Consultation and Behavioral Interventions, including the school-wide and parent/community use of social skills (or problem-solving) and aggression control training; (6) Parent Training, Tutoring, and Support; and (7) Research and Accountability.

Project ACHIEVE's training is facilitated by pupil services personnel and involves regular and special education teachers, paraprofessionals, school staff (custodial, cafeteria, office), substitute teachers, bus drivers, and volunteers. In addition, the training is extended to and utilizes parent involvement and community agencies (after care facilities, community-based programs). A unique aspect of the training is the use of a "training of trainers" format that is designed to increase the number of individuals (particularly pupil services personnel) who can train others within the school district and the community.

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Project ACHIEVE's School Safety and Effective Behavior Management Model

The foundation to Project ACHIEVE's School Safety and Effective Behavior Management Model is a systems approach that focuses on the organizational requirements and processes that result in effective building-wide prosocial behavior management and positive, skills-oriented student discipline systems. The three primary components needed for any successful school discipline and behavior management system include:

- (a) the development of student and staff skills that result in students' demonstrating prosocial interpersonal, problem-solving, and conflict resolution skills;
- (b) the development of teacher, grade-level, and building-wide accountability systems; and
- (c) the development of staff and administrative consistency patterns such that student behavior is reinforced and consequted in a constant fashion.

Beyond this, the model extends to analyses of "special situations"—building-wide behavioral situations involving problems that occur in a school's more-public areas and that involve students but are not completely caused by or solved through interventions only with these students. Often, special situations involve problems in such places as the school's cafeteria, hallways, buses, recess or playgrounds, or media centers or other "common" areas. These special situations are analyzed by considering the following domains: (a) student characteristics, issues, and factors; (b) teacher/staff characteristics, issues, and factors; (c) environmental characteristics, issues, and factors—physical plant and logistics; (d) incentives and consequences; and (e) resources.

Finally, this model emphasizes the need for school districts and buildings to have *Prevention, Intervention, and Crisis Response* teams relative to overall school safety. These district- and building-level teams should involve administrators, staff, students, parents, and relevant community leaders; and they should develop plans and procedures to prevent and respond to potential crisis situations. These situations might include: racial, multicultural, and diversity issues; school violence and weapons issues; drug and alcohol issues; tolerance and harassment issues;

mental health, depression, and suicide issues; and life transitions and family crisis issues.

Implementation & Goals

Over a two-year period of implementation, the components discussed briefly above are systematically implemented in a way that addresses the individual strengths, weaknesses, resources, and barriers of the school building or district. Ultimately, the goals of Project ACHIEVE's Social Skills, Discipline/Behavior Management, and School Safety System are:

- (a) To prepare every teacher in a school building to effectively teach social skills to their students on a bi-monthly basis in their classrooms;
- (b) To prepare every other staff person in the building with the skills and resources to support and reinforce this classroom-based instruction;
- (c) To develop and implement a classroom-, grade-level, and building-wide accountability system that extends the social skills process to include an educative time-out process while identifying expected student behavior (with corresponding incentives) and different levels of inappropriate student behavior (with corresponding consequences);
- (d) To create a staff support and reinforcement infrastructure that helps staff to feel comfortable and competent with the social skills and time-out processes and that encourages the consistent use of the social skills and accountability systems developed;
- (e) To establish a data management system that can track the outcomes and success of the program at student, teacher, grade, and building levels;
- (f) To form a School Climate of Disciplinary Committee that can analyze building-level "special situations," develop and implement crisis prevention and response plans and approaches, and that can coordinate additional behavioral intervention training and resources for classroom teachers; and
- (g) To involve students, parents, community agencies and programs, and other community leaders in a collaborative effort that supports all of the goals above and that extends the Project's training and implementation to home and community.

Further, if these goals are accomplished, then the following **outcomes** should occur:

1. Significant reductions in student discipline problems referred to the office.
2. Significant reductions in the number of student suspensions and expulsions.
3. Increased levels of positive reinforcement for students who are demonstrating appropriate behavior and making prosocial choices.
4. Increased levels of student academic engagement.
5. Increased levels of consistency across teachers and staff in classrooms and throughout the building in dealing with student behavior and behavior problems.
6. A more positive and supportive school climate across students and staff.
7. More parents and community programs using the social skills process and linking the school's discipline, behavior management, and safety approaches with their own.

Longitudinal Results of Project ACHIEVE

Below are three summaries of outcome evaluations of project ACHIEVE over time (Knoff, in press). While the three sites described vary as to student composition (see Table 1), length of implementation, and outcome measures collected, the trends reflected by the data are similar.

Jesse Keen Elementary School (Lakeland, FL)

Project ACHIEVE began at Jesse Keen Elementary School at the beginning of the 1990-91 school year. Demographically, Jesse Keen's enrollment remained fairly stable over an eight-year period of time (see Table 1).

Relative to outcomes, data from the first eight years of Project implementation along with one year (1989-90) of pre-intervention data were analyzed for comparison purposes. Pre-intervention data were compared to the averaged eight-year Project data (see Table 2)

Relative to students' academic progress, CTBS data were analyzed to compare (a) **cohorts** who had "experienced" Project ACHIEVE from kindergarten on (those in Grade 2 beginning with the 1992-93 school year) versus those who were in a higher grade level when the Project began, and (b) those years (1995 and later) when every grade level in the building taking the CTBS had experienced the Project from kindergarten on versus those (1994 and earlier) who had only partially experienced the Project. Table 3 shows the academic outcome data for both the cohort analysis and the building analysis.

Briefly, the **Florida Writes Test** data showed a positive trend, relative to the percentage of fourth graders receiving a passing score or higher, especially over the last four and two years of the Project.

Table 1
Demographics, Enrollment and Implementation Start Dates for ACHIEVE Schools

	Jesse Keen Elementary School (Lakeland, FL)	Cleveland Elementary Scholl (Tampa, FL)	Hotchkiss Elementary School (Dallas TX)
Year of ACHIEVE implementation	Project Start 1990-91	Project Start 1993-94	Project Start 1994-1995
Enrollment (mean)	Range 613-682 (658)	Range 448-538 (503)	Range 934-1193 (1062)
Attendance (mean)			
Student	94%	97%	96%
Teacher	97%	94%	97%
Student poverty level (mean)	87%	97%	82%
Student mobility (new and withdrawn)	72%	65%	56%
Ethnicity (mean)			
Caucasian	60%	20%	15%
African American	30%	62%	43%
Hispanic		17%	40%
Other ethnicity	10%	<1%	<2%

Cleveland Elementary School (Tampa, FL)

Project ACHIEVE began at Cleveland Elementary School at the beginning of the 1993-94 school year. Demographically, Cleveland Elementary's enrollment increased slightly after the first year and then remained fairly stable over the last four years (see Table 1). The race-related data suggest a trend toward fewer Caucasian students and more Hispanic students.

Relative to outcomes, data from the first five years of Project implementation along with two years (1991-92 and 1992-93) of pre-intervention data were analyzed for select variables (see Table 4). All of these data showed a generally declining trend over the five years of the Project.

The academic outcomes for Cleveland Elementary School during the Project ACHIEVE years were analyzed by the average percentile rank of students in Total Reading, Total Math, and Total Language on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), a national group achievement test given to all Hillsborough County students in the late Spring of each school year; and by the percentage of Grade 4 students scoring at or above the average score on the Florida Writes Test. Once again, the SAT data were evaluated by "grade-level cohorts" so that the information for a specific group of students could be tracked by year as they progressed from grade to grade. As with the Jesse Keen data, the Cleveland Elementary School data were analyzed to compare

cohorts who had "experienced" Project ACHIEVE from kindergarten on (those in Grade 2 beginning with the 1995-96 school year) versus those who were in a higher grade level when the Project began (see Table 5). Because the Project had been at Cleveland Elementary for only five years, it was only during

Table 2
Student Outcomes: Mean Annual Special Education and Discipline Referrals by Site
for Pre-intervention Comparison and ACHIEVE Project Years
Jesse Keen Elementary School (Lakeland, FL)

	Pre-intervention 1989-1990 mean #/100	Project Years 1990-98 Mean #/100 (% change)
special education referrals	10.	sd 0.8388 (-61%)
special education placements	6	sd 2.40 (-57%)
overall discipline referrals to principal		sd 17.13 61.4316%
School-based discipline referrals to principal's office	37	sd 31.4057 (-10%)
School bus discipline referrals to principal's office	35	sd 38.001 (-26%)
Out-of-school suspensions	9	sd 4.103 (-29%)
Grade retentions	6	sd 6.04 (-47%)

Table 3
Student Outcomes for Jesse Keen Elementary School, Lakeland, FL
Average Academic Achievement Scores for Cohorts
and for Entire Building: Partial and Full ACHIEVE Project Experience

	By ACHIEVE Experience Cohort		Full Building	
	Partial Project 1992-1994 After grade 2K - grade 2	Full Project 1992-1994 After grade 2	Partial Project Prior to 1994	Full Project After 1994
CBTS Scores	% sd	% sd	% sd	% sd
Reading scores at or above 50th percentile	29.4 (4.45)	33.3 (3.05)	28.8 (4.08)	35.0 (1.78)
Math scores at or above 50th percentile	35.8 (2.69)	40.3 (2.87)	35.9 (8.11)	41.1 (3.61)
Language scores at or above 50th percentile	35.7 (1.39)	40.3 (6.83)	36.3 (6.16)	40.9 (2.17)

^a Students beginning experience of ACHIEVE after grade 2.

^b Students experiencing ACHIEVE from K - grade 2.

^c Scores for all students in building; including both Partial and Full Cohorts prior to 1994.

^d Scores for all students in building starting year when all grade levels experienced ACHIEVE.

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Table 4
Student Outcomes: Mean Annual Special Education and Discipline Referrals for ACHIEVE Project Years
Cleveland Elementary School (Tampa, FL)

Outcomes	Project Years 1993-1998 Mean #/100
special education referrals	4.4 sd±1.67
special education placements	2.6 sd±1.14
total discipline referrals to principal's office	16.5 sd±2.60
unduplicated school based referrals to principal's office (minus 94-95 data)	16.5 sd±9.95
inschool suspensions	16.4 sd±12.10
Average unduplicated inschool suspensions	10.4 sd±6.27
Out-of-school suspensions	4.2 sd±3.77
Unduplicated out-of-school suspensions	4.0 sd±2.00

Table 5
Student Outcomes for Cleveland Elementary School, Tampa, FL
Average Academic SAT Scores for Partial^a and Full ACHIEVE Project Experience Cohorts

SAT Test	Partial Project Experience percentile (mean)	Full Project Experience percentile (mean)
Total Reading	27 (6.93)	39 (3.58)
Total Math	34 (12.10)	49 (2.52)
Total Language percentile	32 (5.92)	36 (6.01)

^a Partial Project Experience = children in a higher grade level when ACHIEVE began

^b Full Project Experience = children had experienced ACHIEVE from Kindergarten to 1995/96 school year and after

Table 6
Student Outcomes: Mean Annual Discipline Referrals
for Pre-Intervention Comparison and ACHIEVE Project Years
Hotchkiss Elementary School (Dallas TX)

	Pre-intervention 1994-95 mean #/100	Project Years 1995-1998 mean #/100 (% change)
overall discipline referrals to the principal's office	56.00	11.0 sd±5.26 (-80%)
Classroom based discipline referrals to the principal's office.	49.00	6.8 sd±1.15 (-86%)

the 1998-99 school year that everyone in the school experienced the full Project.

While somewhat variable, the percentage of fourth graders passing the Florida Writes Test generally improved over time with 87% of the students passing the test in the 1997-98 school year.

Hotchkiss Elementary School (Dallas, TX)

Project ACHIEVE began at Hotchkiss Elementary School at the very end of the 1994-95 school year, its first year in existence. Demographically, Hotchkiss Elementary's enrollment steadily increased since it opened, ranging from 934 to 1193 students per year (see Table 1). The race-related data suggested a trend toward fewer Caucasian students and more Hispanic students.

Relative to outcomes, some limited data from the first four years of Project implementation were available for analysis. Because the Project was not introduced to the school's staff until April of the 1994-95 year, this year was used as a baseline and comparison year for the next three years. As shown in Table 6, the discipline data show clear decreases over the three functional years of the Project.

The academic outcomes for Hotchkiss Elementary School during the Project ACHIEVE years were analyzed using average Normal Curve Equivalents and the percent of students scoring about the 50th percentile in Total Reading and Total Math on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), a national group achievement test given to all Dallas Independent School District students in the late Spring of each school year; by the percent of students passing the Reading and Math sections of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS); and by the percentage of Grade 4 students passing the TAAS Writing test. Once

again, the data were evaluated by "grade-level cohorts" so that the information for a specific group of students was tracked by year as they progressed from grade to grade. While cohort and annual means and standard deviations were calculated, no comparisons were made as Project ACHIEVE was in place for only three full years (from the 1995-96 school year on).

In reviewing the ITBS Reading data during the three Project ACHIEVE years, it appeared that a positive trend in the average Normal Curve Equivalent earned by all of the students taking the test was emerging. Students receiving free lunch support due to their economic status showed a similar, but more variable, trend as their Reading scores averaged slightly below those for the entire school. The ITBS Math data showed a similar positive trend for all of the students at Hotchkiss Elementary with the lower SES students showing a marked improvement. Significantly, the building's Reading and Math ITBS scores averaged near the 50th percentile—quite impressive for a school with the demographic characteristics of Hotchkiss.

The TAAS data showed similar positive trends in Reading and Math during the three full Project ACHIEVE years with the low SES students again slightly underperforming all of the students in the building. Significantly, a very high percentage of the school passed the TAAS in both these academic areas. In Writing at the fourth grade level, there was more variability in the data, but over 80% of all students passed this test during the 1997-98 administration.

Implications

There have been many changes in our society in recent years, with results that affect the children in our schools. The impact of television, significantly less adult supervision and feedback, increases in poverty, and changes in the family "unit" have all contributed to children coming to school less prepared to actively engage the schooling process. As a result, teachers are experiencing more discipline problems in their classrooms, they are having to teach children who do not have some of the basic skills necessary to learn (listening, following directions, etc.), and the entire process is becoming increasingly frustrating. In years past, schools have relied on families to teach their children positive interpersonal skills and non-violent approaches to conflict resolution. In recent years, this task often falls on the schools. As the findings discussed illustrate, and as national awards endorse (Appendix), Project ACHIEVE is a promising comprehensive approach to equipping schools to create supportive learning environments.

References

- Knoff, H. M., & Batsche, G. M. (1995). Project ACHIEVE: Analyzing a school reform process for at-risk and underachieving students. *School Psychology Review, 24*, 579-603.
- Knoff, H. M. (in press). A longitudinal look at three national Project ACHIEVE sites

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Appendix National Recognition of Project ACHIEVE

- Highlighted in Safe, Drug-Free, and Effective Schools for ALL Children: What Works! A joint report of the U. S. Department of Education's Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Office of Special Education Programs, April, 1998.
- Identified as an effective school reform program by the Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice of the American Institutes for Research, Washington, D. C., January, 1997.
- Semi-finalist in the U. S. Department of Education's National Awards Program for Model Professional Development, October, 1996.
- Recipient of over \$8 million in external Federal and State grants (Department of Education) over the past five years, including four U. S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education training grants and one U. S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Innovation field-initiated research grant.
- One of five programs across the country to be funded by the Metropolitan Life Foundation's Positive Choices: Youth Anti-Violence Initiatives program in the Fall of 1995 for \$100,000.
- Received Honorable Mention in the Coalition on Educational Initiatives' and USA TODAY's Community Solutions for Education national awards program, May, 1995. The Coalition on Educational Initiatives includes Apple Computer, Inc.; Proctor & Gamble; State Farm Insurance Companies; and Subaru of America, Inc., and over twenty national professional associations.
- Designated as the best Model Student Services Program in Florida by the State Department of Education in its "Promising Programs and Practices" competition for 1994-1998
- Highlighted on the ABC News' 20/20 program "Being Teased, Taunted, and Bullied" on April 28th, 1995
- Featured at the April, 1995 National Education Association Safe Schools Summit in Los Angeles
- Invited for presentation at the National Education Goals Panel/National Association of Pupil Personnel Service Organization's "Safe Schools, Safe Communities" meeting in Washington, D. C., October, 1994
- Project Co-Directors awarded the "Outstanding Educators Award" from the Florida Association of Student Services Administrators, 1993